

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Previously amended) A composition for thickening hydrophobic liquids comprising a layered silicate material, surfaces of said layered silicate material modified by an amphipathic copolymer comprising a first comonomer that generates a hydrophilic homopolymer that is essentially insoluble in a hydrophobic liquid and a second comonomer that generates a hydrophobic homopolymer that is soluble in a hydrophobic liquid.

2. (Original) The composition of claim 1 further comprising a thickening aid.

3. (Original) The composition of claim 2 wherein the thickening aid is selected from the group consisting of propylene carbonate, hexylene glycol, ethanol, propylene glycol, butylene glycol, water, and mixtures thereof.

4. (Previously amended) The composition of claim 34 wherein the hydrophobic liquid comprises one or more nonpolar liquid having a dielectric constant of less than about 10.

5. (Previously amended) The composition of claim 34 wherein the hydrophobic liquid is selected from the group consisting of a silicone oil, a mineral oil, a liquid hydrocarbon, a petroleum-derived oil, an ester solvent, a vegetable oil, a flower oil, and mixtures thereof.

6. (Original) The composition of claim 1 wherein the layered silicate material comprises a smectite clay, a sodium lithium magnesium silicate, or a mixture thereof.

7. (Original) The composition of claim 6 wherein the smectite clay is selected from the group consisting of bentonite, montmorillonite, saponite, hectorite, bidelite, stevensite, and mixtures thereof.

8. (Original) The composition of claim 1 wherein the copolymer is a graft copolymer or a block copolymer.

9. (Original) The composition of claim 1 wherein the copolymer is soluble or dispersible in hydrophobic liquids having a dielectric constant of less than about 10.

10. (Original) The composition of claim 9 wherein the copolymer comprises a triblock copolymer.

11. (Previously amended) The composition of claim 10 wherein the triblock copolymer comprises poly(ethylene glycol-30)-co-dipoly(hydroxystearate), polydimethylsiloxane-polyoxyethylene 15 polymer/3-isocyanatomethyl-3,5,5-trimethylcyclohexyl isocyanate copolymer, or a mixture thereof.

12. (Original) The composition of claim 1 wherein the first comonomer, when polymerized, provides a homopolymer selected from the group consisting of poly(oxyethylene), poly(ethylene glycol), poly(propylene glycol), poly(vinyl chloride), poly(acrylate), and poly(acrylamide).

13. (Previously amended) The composition of claim 1 wherein the second comonomer, when polymerized, provides a homopolymer selected from the group consisting of poly(hydroxystearate), poly(12-hydroxystearic acid), poly(lauryl methacrylate), polystyrene, poly(dimethylsiloxane), poly(vinyl acetate), poly(methyl methacrylate), and poly(vinyl methyl ether).

14. (Previously amended) The composition of claim 34 comprising about 30% to about 90% of the hydrophobic liquid, about 0.5% to about 70% of the layered silicate, and about 0.025% to about 50% of the copolymer, by weight, of the composition.

15. (Original) The composition of claim 14 further comprising a thickening aid in an amount of about 0.025% to about 20%, by weight, of the composition.

16. (Original) The composition of claim 1 further comprising about 0.1% to about 50%, by weight, of the composition of at least one functional particulate material.

17. (Original) The composition of claim 16 wherein the functional particulate material is selected from the group consisting of titanium dioxide, mica, calcium carbonate, kaolinite clay, alumina, talc, zinc oxide, calcium sulfate, iron oxide, an organic pigment, and mixtures thereof.

18. (Previously amended) A method of producing the composition of claim 34 comprising dissolving the copolymer in the hydrophobic liquid, adding the layered silicate material, then homogenizing the resulting slurry in a high shear mixer or an extruder.

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Cancelled)

21. (Cancelled)

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Cancelled)

25. (Cancelled)

26. (Cancelled)

27. (Cancelled)

28. (Cancelled)

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Cancelled)

31. (Cancelled)

32. (Cancelled)

33. (Cancelled)

34. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 1 further comprising a hydrophobic liquid.

35. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 34 having a Brookfield viscosity at 0.5 rpm and 25°C of at least 5,000 centipoises when the layered silicate is present in an amount of 3.4% by weight.

36. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 34 having a Brookfield viscosity at 0.5 rpm and 25°C of about 50,000 to about 1,325,000 centipoises when the layered silicate is present in an amount of 3.4% by weight.

37. (Previously presented) The method of claim 18 further comprising adding a thickening aid to the hydrophobic liquid.

38. (New) The composition of claim 1 wherein the amphipathic copolymer is capable of delaminating the layered silicate.